

Journaling Tips

Record, then reflect

Record events and experiences as they happen before writing about your reaction to them. For example, if you had an argument with a loved one write point by point what happened (e.g. Mom came over when we were watching TV. She said she agreed with the host, and I did not. I commented on my distaste for the program. She appeared to be upset. We had an argument.) Explain simply what happened. With the event recorded, you can fill in the blanks explaining how the incident made you feel, what your thoughts were, and how you reacted.

By recording exactly what happened first, you'll be better able to reflect on it at a later date. When you write in a state of reaction, the events become harder to interpret upon review. We all tend to see things differently when time has passed.

Write with Honesty

Try not to judge your actions. When your inner critic kicks in, it can be tempting to "sugar coat" your feelings and reactions. If you feel like slapping someone on a particular day, express it, don't cover it up, write it down. If you are to learn from your thoughts/feelings/reactions then you need a safe place to express them. That's what a journal is for.

Avoid Writing for Others

In journaling, attempt to express yourself freely, without the restriction of grammar rules, spelling, and all the other things that can distract you from the genuine purpose or reflective writing: candid self-expression.

When writing for an audience, your writing becomes a performance. The only audience member of a journal should be you.

Emotional Outlet

A journal provides the perfect outlet for constructive expressions of our thoughts, desires, and emotions. Use your journaling to write about your fears, address anger, express frustration, and all of the other life-draining emotions one tends to keep bottled up. By repressing emotions, we waste a lot of energy that could be put to better use. Journaling allows you that outlet so that you can reclaim that energy.

Be Cautious

A journal can't be a replacement for discussing your problems. Studies have shown that for individuals going through traumatic events, journaling can, in some cases, be unhealthy. If the writer uses the process to focus on the negative, it can perpetuate or worsen your emotional problems.

The trick, as in all things, is to find balance. Use some of the techniques mentioned above to make sure you're looking at the situation from an objective, as well as subjective, point of view. Analyze your reactions. And if an issue you're dealing with continues to bother you, contact a counselor.